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HOUSEKEEPERS' CHAT

Thursday, May 9, 1935

(FOR BROADCAST USE ONLY)

Subject: "Home Canning on the Enchanted Isle." Information from the Extension Office, United States Department of Agriculture.

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The news I have for your today comes from the extension workers in the Department of Agriculture. It's about some interesting doings on the island of Puerto Rico. Maybe you never thought of scientific homemaking on this enchanted isle. Well, it's a new idea to the islanders themselves. But from all reports they're taking it up with enthusiasm. Home demonstration work, such as we have here in every State, has started there. Puerto Rico has six new home demonstration agents, all natives, and all home economics graduates of the University of Puerto Rico. This spring they've been hard at work giving home canning demonstrations. Home canning is something brand new for most Puerto Rican housewives. And it's something very necessary for the health of their families. You see, the farm population has long been suffering from too limited a diet. And they've had no knowledge at all of how to preserve food.

The experiment station on the island and various social-service organizations made a study recently of the needs of the rural people. This study showed that farm families were buying two-thirds of their food. As this is a tropical country with almost no refrigeration in rural areas, food spoils easily. During the greater part of the year people suffer from a lack of protein--meat, fish or eggs--and also a lack of fresh vegetables. In the interior, families eat salt codfish brought from the States rather than the fish caught on their own coast. The reason, of course, is that the fresh fish from their coast is nearly always in bad condition by the time it gets inland and consequently people regard it as poisonous. So the local government has been very interested in teaching the people how to can their own fish.

Well, during two weeks of this past March, more than 3,500 people came to the canning meetings. One of the new agents reported that these were not only housewives but also teachers of home economics, nurses, farmers, lawyers, and business men. Let me read you exactly what she says about one of the meetings:

"One of the lawyers was so interested that he went home and brought his daughter. 'I want her to learn all these useful things,' he said. People were as interested in the equipment as in anything else. They kept asking prices and commenting on the utilization of the canned products. About nine nurses were present and we had a good discussion of the wholesomeness and nutritive value of tomato juice. Everyone wanted to have directions for canning tomato juice, so I promised to have them in my office where they could come for them at any time.

"The men have been as interested as the women in attending the demonstrations and many times were in the majority. They were going to investigate this new-fangled notion for themselves and for their families. They are canning almost everything available, some with strange names like grandules (grand-you-lees) and chayotes (hay-o-tees).

"We had a canning demonstration in Las Vegas yesterday--a whole day canning of vegetables. We canned around 65 tins and jars of tomatoes, pigeon peas, chayotes, grapefruit, and also orange and grapefruit juice. We are planning to go there on Monday for another day of canning and then on to a nearby town on Wednesday for vegetable canning and meat canning. They have asked for fish canning some day soon.

"I wish you had seen the fishers yesterday. They are so much interested in canning as a means of saving fish which they otherwise would lose. Besides they are thinking of bartering with the vegetable growers of the highlands. I think this will be a fine chance for improving the food habits of both the fisher and the vegetable grower in Puerto Rico."

The food problem seems the most urgent of all homemaking problems on this island. In the canning work, the home demonstration people have cooperated with the Puerto Rico Emergency Relief Organization. Each agent now has a complete set of canning equipment for her office so she can have demonstrations there. She also has a traveling set to carry around to the farmhouses. The relief organization in each district is building canning kitchens which the home demonstration agents will manage.

When the work started, the 48,000 empty cans sent from the States looked rather overpowering to the new workers. But now a great many of these are full of fruits, vegetables, meat and fish and are reposing on the pantry shelves of many farm families. Others have gone to the relief organization for the needy in payment for the use of its canning equipment. Agents, social service workers, and farm families themselves are looking forward to days of better diet and better health for Puerto Rico.

Well, tomorrow you and I will be doing a little talking about our own canning problems. We won't be putting up chayotes or grandules this summer but many of us will be saving our own American garden vegetables this way. If by any chance, you don't own a copy of the Department of Agriculture canning bulletin, better send for one now while there's a free supply on the shelves waiting for you. This bulletin is called "Canning Fruits and Vegetables at Home" and its number is 1471. Write direct to the United States Department of Agriculture at Washington, D. C.

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